

2 January 1965

The Honorable Dean Rusk
The Secretary of State
Washington, D. C.

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Dear Mr. Secretary:

In order to pull together the bulk of the indicators of increased Communist military posture and capabilities in Southeast Asia, the attached Intelligence Memorandum has been prepared.

I think you will find it of interest.

Faithfully yours,

/s/

Marshall S. Carter
Lieutenant General, USA
Acting Director

STAT

Attachment:
Intelligence Memorandum, dtd 31 December 1964,
[redacted], subject, "Communist
Military Posture and Capabilities vis-a-vis Southeast
Asia."

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31 December 1964

Copy No. 143

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

COMMUNIST MILITARY POSTURE AND
CAPABILITIES VIS-A-VIS SOUTHEAST ASIA

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE
Office of Current Intelligence

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
31 December 1964

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Communist Military Posture and Capabilities
Vis-a-vis Southeast Asia

SUMMARY

In recent weeks we have noted a number of Communist troop movements in Laos, both into the Plaine des Jarres area and farther south in the area adjacent to the Seventeenth Parallel. These deployments have put the enemy in a considerably better position to launch an offensive either out of the Plaine or toward the Mekong. Coupled with the continuing development of Hanoi's infiltration apparatus, they also could supply a significant increment to the already substantial--and as yet not fully committed--Viet Cong strength in the northern provinces of South Vietnam.

With the continuing long-range build-up of a logistic base in the Kunming and Canton military districts which began in 1960, and the short-range build-up of air strength in these districts and in North Vietnam which was triggered by the Tonkin Gulf episodes last summer, the Communists are increasingly able both to defend against any US air attacks on North Vietnam and to retaliate by raising the level of ground action in Laos and South Vietnam. Although there have been no major Chinese ground force deployments, Chinese and North Vietnamese forces now in the area are already strong enough for this purpose. They could be massively reinforced within a few weeks from the Chinese interior.

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Peiping's Ground Threat

1. The Chinese have long been interested in preparing a base for military operations against Southeast Asia. They have been building up their military facilities--airfields, barracks areas, supply points, etc.--since at least 1960, especially in the Kunming Military Region. In conjunction with these activities extensive road-building projects were initiated. A rail line north from Kunming which will link with the main Chinese rail arteries was begun. Recently work on this line was given a higher priority, but it will still be several years before it is completed.

2. While this construction has been going forward, Peiping has maintained a fairly large ground force in both the Kunming and Canton military regions. This force remains today essentially at the strength it had five years ago. There are about 250,000 troops within 200 miles of the Laos - North Vietnamese border which could be moved into the area on short notice. These forces could be further augmented by additional reserves farther to the north within a matter of weeks. While these forces could intervene in Laos or Vietnam directly, the Chinese would probably intervene with ground forces only if the North Vietnamese should find it impossible to defend their joint areas of interest. Peiping is able to achieve its purposes by providing support to the relatively large North Vietnamese armed forces who in turn channel material aid and men to assist both the Pathet Lao and Viet Cong as required.

Communist Air Deployments and Air Defense Measures

3. Peiping, made aware in early August that the US was willing to use its air power against Communist targets, reacted quickly and in force. The Chinese immediately moved a regiment of jet fighters into North Vietnam's Phuc Yen airfield and in the following four months more than doubled their air strength in the area--from [redacted] jet fighters. This air build-up included a number of MIG-19 (Farmer) and a few MIG-21 (Fishbed) jet fighters. An increase in radar installations, many with [redacted] long-range early warning and ground-control-intercept equipment, has accompanied the build-up of fighter strength. In addition, elements of one antiaircraft artillery division were transferred from East China to the Sino-DRV border area near Ningming where construction of a new airfield was recently begun. Since mid-December jet fighter strength at Phuc Yen has been further increased [redacted]

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Chinese Naval Forces

4. Peiping's South China Fleet--the weakest of Peiping's three fleets--recently initiated steps to increase its capability in the Tonkin Gulf. The headquarters of the South Sea Fleet was transferred from Canton to Chanchiang on the Luichou Peninsula and a new naval base was established at Lungmen on the north shore of the Tonkin Gulf. Although the South Sea Fleet has no major naval vessels, it has numerous patrol craft and motor torpedo boats which could constitute a limited threat to US naval operations in the Tonkin Gulf.

North Vietnamese Military Forces

5. Hanoi maintains the largest ground force in Southeast Asia. It is well trained for the type of operation it is engaged in and has a dedicated leadership which views the conflict in Southeast Asia as a long-range objective. It is prepared to wage a long-term conflict to achieve its ends and is also prepared to run considerable risk vis-a-vis the US.

6. The main element of Hanoi's military strength is its ground force, which now numbers about 220,000. Several of its major units have had a long history of experience in Laos. Since 1960 the Vietnamese have moved elements of these units in and out as necessary to support the Pathet Lao. They have a demonstrated effectiveness against the Lao forces which is to some extent psychological, but there is also no doubt that these units are better trained and more determined on the battlefield.

7. Hanoi's tactical air strength now includes the [redacted] jet fighters at Phuc Yen. How many of these are under Chinese control and how many are North Vietnamese is not known. The capability of these aircraft for effective interdiction has been improved by the appearance of ground-controlled-intercept equipment and height-finding radar in the North Vietnamese air defense system.

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DRV Support to Viet Cong

8. The North Vietnamese have apparently stepped up the flow of men and materiel into the hands of the

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Viet Cong during the past year. There is recent evidence that in at least some areas of South Vietnam the Communists have provided the Viet Cong with a family of Chinese Communist - manufactured light infantry weapons, all using the same caliber of ammunition. This reduces their dependence upon captured equipment and at the same time simplifies the logistic problem of supplying many different types of ammunition to the Viet Cong units.

9. The infiltration of military personnel into South Vietnam appears to have been maintained at a high rate this year, or perhaps even stepped up.

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10. The appearance this year for the first time of substantial numbers of native-born northerners in the ranks of the infiltrates indicates that Hanoi is determined to push ahead with the insurrection even though it means the more open identification of North Vietnam with the Viet Cong. There has been other evidence recently of the open recruitment of northerners for service in the south.

Communist Forces in Laos

11. Communist forces have been engaged in a steady build-up in Laos since the end of the rainy season in October. The major effort has been directed toward strengthening Communist positions in the Plaine des Jarres area. Since late September, when the Route 7 supply artery from North Vietnam was reopened for large-scale truck convoys, a daily average of between 15 and 20 trucks has moved onto the Plaine. Although in the majority of observations the cargo was undetermined, both troops and supplies are known to have been transported.

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12. To date, the Pathet Lao have refrained from any major moves in the Plaine area. Their increased strength, however, has been demonstrated by the failure of two recently mounted government drives. Although supported by the T-28 aircraft of the Laotian Air Force, both offensives--one against Communist positions north of Tha Thom and the other against the strategic hill position at Phou Kout, northwest of the Plaine--ran into stiff opposition and failed to make any significant headway.

13. More recently, the Communists have been strengthening their forces in southern and central Laos. In mid-December an estimated 500-600 troops--reportedly North Vietnamese--were transported along Route 12 toward the Nhommarath-Mahaxay region east of Thakhek. At about the same time substantial numbers of troops--probably several battalions--were reported moving south on foot along Route 23 toward the Tchepone - Muong Phine area. The next week this route, which had been impassable for over six months during the rainy season, was opened to truck traffic.

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reported that southbound traffic was "continuously moving" between the hours of 1900 and 2400 during the period 23-26 December. Although the ultimate purpose of these troop and truck movements is unknown, they may be slated for deployment along Route 9 to the Ban Nong Boua Lao area where rightist forces have been stepping up their military pressure. Some of these forces--perhaps including antiaircraft artillery specialists--will very likely be charged with increasing the security of the infiltration routes to South Vietnam.

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Elements of the 325th in past years have been suspected of operating in central Laos, where they have served to protect vital transportation routes used for the supply of Communist troops in Laos and possibly in South Vietnam.

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15. In summary, these developments mean that the Communists, although they have thus far refrained from major aggressive action, have increased their capability to move sharply against government positions near the Communist-held Plaine des Jarres and along the Mekong Valley.

Communist Propaganda

16. Communist propaganda continues to reflect the determination of Hanoi to push ahead in South Vietnam in the face both of stepped-up air strikes in the Laos corridor and of rumors in the Western press of US intentions to carry the war in South Vietnam to the north. North Vietnam's defiant attitude was reiterated most recently in connection with the 20 and 22 December anniversaries of the formation of the Liberation Front and the North Vietnamese Army, respectively. There was no hint of any give in Communist terms for a negotiated settlement. The North Vietnamese party daily on 19 December stated that Hanoi would not talk peace "until the aggressor abandons his schemes."

17. Moscow and Peiping have continued to give full propaganda backing to Hanoi and have reiterated earlier pledges of support for North Vietnam in the event of US attacks on it. The Chinese repeated their earlier warning that US use of Laotian territory to expand the war in Vietnam could spread the "flames of war" throughout Indochina. Moscow has also cautioned Souvanna Phouma along the same lines.

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